

CHARACTER AND TRADITION



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CHARACTER AND TRADITION

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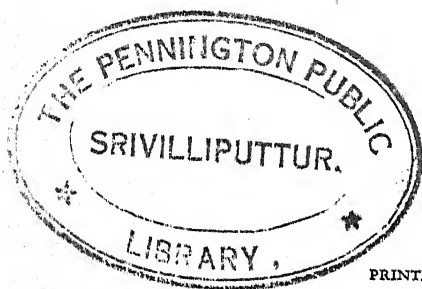
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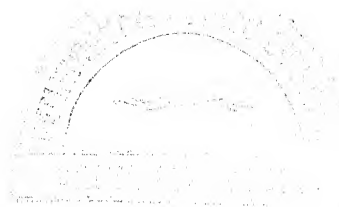
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"If we fulfil not our engagement,
May the sky fall on us and crush us;
May the earth, opening, swallow us up;
May the sea, overflowing its borders, drown us."
Arrian, Book I, Ch. 4.

THESE words are taken by Mr. Douglas Hyde from a very ancient book dealing with our Celtic forefathers. The expression in the first line of this heroic verse—"If we fulfil not our engagement"—conveys to my mind the idea of "Destiny," which no doubt is the correct interpretation. The sentiment, it must be owned, is lofty as well as beautiful even if, to modern ideas, somewhat arrogant, but we are dealing with a lordly and haughty race.

I have tried to sketch in a brief and fanciful manner the legends and stories of our race, and we have much to study. No one should read the gospel of exact truth into the narrative, yet I maintain that old legends are not to be despised. There is much that is true hidden in them. Legends at least portray

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the characteristics of the race and reveal what would not otherwise have been known. Characteristics that persist for a great length of time, despite much mixing of blood, are surely something solid, dynamic forces: they are our destiny.

I was musing one day by the beach of a beautiful stretch of water in Ulster—Strangford Loch, as the Norsemen called it, changing it from its earlier and nicer name of Loch Cuan, the Loch of the Harbour or Haven. It has a history teeming with tradition which leads us back, not only into the heroic age of Ireland but to the very cradle of the Celtic race, a race whose history is a tangle of wanderings and warlike adventure and of prowess. It is particularly in Ireland that you feel how much the past is linked up with the present. I was thinking especially of the great deeds of the Ulster hero, Cuchulain, one of whose exploits took place on its shores.

Suddenly I became aware of a rushing mighty sound, and, gazing into the heavens whence the sound arose, I saw two objects, like great black birds, swan-like in their majesty and speed. On they came, circling above me, lower and lower, till they swooped

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down into the water, with the motion of wing and speed almost of an angry male swan, surging at you with ruffled wings. I thought that these beautiful flying boats, with their crews of pigeon-blue men, were an epic in themselves. They are the future—the world is in their hands. They are the guardians of our destiny. They swept over Strangford Loch with mighty wing and pulsing flight. They appeared as suddenly out of space as the Vikings swooped down on the unsuspecting Irish monks of old.

Hastily marshalling my soaring thoughts, I cast them forward and behind, and I pen these lines to the Navigators of the Air—the Force of the Future. We are an island people of mixed race. Our horizons are the sea and the air—Briton and Pict, Viking and Dane, Saxon and Celt. The latter, in a peculiar degree, have always been pioneers and navigators, sailing to all corners of the globe. We have inherited from this race, down throughout distant ages, this spirit of daring the unknown, driving them forth through storm and tempest to seek strange lands—whether it was to conquer territory, spread the Gospel, or ride the Main in search of gain.

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It is a fact—too little realised—especially in England, how much we have inherited from our Celtic ancestors. Some of the Irish and the Highlanders and the folk of the Western Isles are perhaps the most striking representatives left, upon whose past the ancient literature of Ireland throws the clearest light. The Celtic race and the Celtic language, according to Mr. Douglas Hyde, sprang from what is to-day modern Germany. The Celts were first known to the Greeks under the semi-mythological name of Hyperborean, only later on being termed either Celt or Galatian. At the height of their power, about 400 B.C., they invaded Italy and stormed Rome. During this time they were closely allied to the Greeks, whose commercial rivalry with the Phœnicians brought about friendly relations with their enemies, the Celts. At this period the Celtic language was spoken from Ireland to the Black Sea. Alexander the Great was aided by the Celts both in his wars with the Etruscans and with the Illyrians. Before he began his great expedition into Asia he assured himself of their friendship. He received their ambassadors on friendly terms, expressing his cordiality towards them, and asked them to become his

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allies. They are reported to have replied to the great monarch: "If we fulfil not our engagement, may the sky fall on us and crush us; may the earth, opening, swallow us up; may the sea, overflowing its borders, drown us."

It is interesting to note in connection with this pledge, that it is recorded, in a very ancient Irish Saga, the *Táin Bo Chuaigne* of the seventh century, that once upon a time some Ulster heroes swore to their King in almost identical language, when he asked them to take his place, as he found it necessary to leave his wing of the battle, to repel some attacks of a rival at the other corner of the battle-field. Their answer was: "Heaven is over us, the earth is under us, the sea is round about us; and unless the firmament falls with its star-showers upon the face of the earth, or unless the earth be destroyed by earthquake, or unless the ridgy, blue-bordered sea come over the expanse of Life, we shall not give an inch of ground."

This sentence seems so much in accord with the one just quoted, that we can easily imagine these haughty and war-like warriors using words such as these. It is further recorded,

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that while the Celtic ambassadors were drinking and pledging Alexander's health, the King asked them, what was the thing they most feared, thinking, says the historian, that they would say himself. Not a bit of it! They replied: "There is only one thing that we fear, which is that the heavens may fall upon us, but the friendship of such a man as you we value more than anything." At these words the monarch could hardly conceal his astonishment, nor was he altogether pleased, and he remarked in an aside to his courtiers that the Celts were certainly a vainglorious people. It is not for me to say if this particular type still persists!

Such then were our Celtic ancestors who wrested Spain from the Phœnicians and conquered half Europe and who were eventually to disappear so completely as to be almost unknown, and their language spoken to-day by only a million or so of people. Of all the tribes of the Celts, the children of Milesius alone are peculiar, in that on their necks the Roman Eagle never fastened its claws. Whether for better or worse the Eagle checked its flight before it reached the shores of Eiré. The all-conquering Roman who had moulded and

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crushed Gaul and Britain never reached the Island in the West. The outstanding effect of the non-conquest of Ireland by the Romans is that the Irish Gael, known in those days as the Scot, is the sole survivor in western countries who has been able to preserve a record of his past. Not only this, but, as Mr. Douglas Hyde shows, in *Literary History of Ireland*, he has preserved a literature of his own for a length of time and with a continuity which has no parallel in Europe outside Greece.

According to tradition, the Scoto-Irish Celt claims that his ancestors, the Milesians, or children of Miledh, came to Ireland from Spain about the year 1000 B.C., and conquered a semi-mythical, beautiful race—half heroes, half gods—called the Tuatha De Danann. These people had previously invaded Ireland themselves at an earlier period. We also hear frequent mention of a race of dark people called Firbolgs who apparently had existed in Ireland, repeatedly conquered and enslaved, but never exterminated.

The whole of the very early history of Ireland is a mixture of pseudo-historic narrative and myth—so blended together that it is impossible

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to disentangle the actual truth from the wrappings surrounding the magical. The wanderings and heroic adventures which beset this race before they landed and settled in these islands are recounted for many generations. Milesius himself traces his ancestry through twenty-two Gaelic names, and thirteen of Hebrew origin till he reaches Japhet and thence to Adam! He and his fellow-clansmen trace their descent to a King of Scythia named Fenius Farsa, from whence his descent from Adam is given. They claimed to be the most ancient inhabitants in Europe after the Deluge. Scythia was stated to be on the borders of Europe and Asia, near the Euxine and Caspian Seas—which might now be the Crimea.

This Fenius Farsa started a great school of languages, which teaching was continued by his son Niul. He had a son called Gaedhal, from whom the Gaels derive their name. Niul travelled to Egypt, where he married Scota, daughter of Pharaoh. Here it was that Niul met Aaron, with whom he made friends or befriended in some manner, in return for which Moses healed his son Gaedhal from the bite of a

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serpent. The legend of S. Patrick and the snakes being banished from Ireland is obviously a Christian version of a much earlier tradition. Thus runs the ancient verse :—

“ No serpent nor vile venom'd thing
Can live upon the Gaelic soil;
No bard nor stranger since has found
A cold repulse from a son of Gaedhal.”

Nearly all the Irish antiquarians maintain that they are called Scots because they came from Scythia. Be this as it may, after countless wanderings and returnings; fighting of battles and voyagings they at length reached a country that was thought to be Spain. Miledh—known as the Warrior of Spain, as he was a celebrated champion—had three sons; and it was these three sons and his nephew who landed in Ireland and founded the race known as the Gaels, first of all called Milesians owing to the latinised form of Milesius for Miledh. The various legends connected with the landing of the Milesians are all most fascinating. One even describes the building of a great tower (a copy presumably of the Tower of Babel), from which their forefathers

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beheld the Irish coast. This tower was described as being built in Spain !

The Milesians sent a force under Ith, the uncle of Milesius, to Ireland, but he was killed by the Tuatha De Danann. After the death of Milesius, his sons having fitted out a powerful fleet and a large force for the invasion of Ireland, they landed at Inver Sceine—now the Bay of Kenmare in the County of Kerry—and a great battle was fought between the Tuatha De Danann and the Milesians at “Slieve Mis” Mountain, in Kerry, where the De Danann were defeated; but “Scota,” the widow of Milesius, was killed while commanding in the engagement, and was buried in a valley on the seashore near Tralee. Ireland is mentioned under many names by the ancients. The Greeks called it Ierne, signifying the Sacred Island, as it was a great seat of Druidism. The Romans called it Hibernia; and Plutarch, Ogygia, which means “The Ancient”: showing, even in those days, that the island was known.

Mr. Hyde relates that Avienus, writing about 380 B.C., mentions the account of the voyage of Himilco, a Phœnician, to Ireland about 350 B.C. He reported that Erin was

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called " *Sacra* " by the ancients, that its people navigated the vast sea in hide-covered barks and that its land was populous and fertile. Mr. Hyde also states that in the *Argonautics* of the pseudo-Orpheus, which may have been written about 500 B.C., the Iernian Isle is mentioned. In later times, in the first century of our era, Pomponius Mela says, " That so great was the luxuriance of grass there as to cause the cattle to burst ! " Tacitus, writing about the year 82, says that it differed but little from Britain, but that its approaches and harbours were better known through traffic and merchants.

In about A.D. 238 Solinus tells us that Hibernia has no snakes, an incident to which I referred further back—the blessing that Moses is supposed to have conferred on Gaedhal. He added that so warlike was the race that the Hibernian mother placed the first morsel of food in her child's mouth at the point of the sword. Ammianus Marcellinus relates that the Irish mentioned under the name of Scots, accompanied by people called Attacotti, are said to be committing dreadful depredations in Britain; and another writer thus poetically refers to the invasion: " The

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Scot moved all Ierne against us, and the Ocean foamed under his hostile oars."

There are many allusions to these raids and counter-raids; and there were marriage visits of ceremony also, and return visits 'twixt Ulster and the Western Isles of Alban. Often they crossed to the Mainland, too.

When we reflect on these exploits we are struck, not only by their audacity, but by their enterprise and valour; especially is this the case when we realise that in those far-off days in the dim and misty past, the only means of transport was the Celtic coracle, those small frail boats covered only by tanned hides. It was in these boats that the folk of these Islands frequently crossed and recrossed the angry waters of the Sea of Moyle, so named from the Moyle or Mull of Cantyre.

There is considerable mystery surrounding the question as to who the Attacotti actually were. It is certain that they are mentioned in many of these raids as accompanying the Scots. From the scanty evidence available they appear to have been an Irish tribe. S. Jerome twice mentions them in connection with the Scots, saying they have their wives and children in common. Pluto advocated

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this practice in his *Republic* and he evidently had met them himself, as he states that he had seen them. Cæsar refers to "rent-paying tribes," which must surely refer to these Attacotti. I believe they were none other than the Firbolgs, so often mentioned in the ancient legends, either the aboriginal race or one that had settled in these parts at a very early period—anyhow, a race of non-Milesian origin, or pre-Celtic tribes.

There has always been great confusion between the names of Scot and Irish, largely due to the mixing-up between the native Firbolgs, a dark-hued race, and their Celtic conquerors. There is a word Aitheach-Tuatha, which means "rent-paying tribes" or unfree clans or serfs, which was probably a general name for non-Celtic tribes, whom the conquering Celts had defeated and enslaved. There are two recorded risings of these people against their Celtic masters, who were regarded as the free clans or the nobility. The first is supposed to have occurred just after the birth of Christ in the year 10, and the later one in the year 36, during which the Celts were almost exterminated, with the nice exception, so runs the legend, of three unborn children of noble

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line! Be this as it may, from the survivors sprang up the race of the great Conn of the Hundred Battles, the Dal Araide, the true Princes of Ulster, and most of the other royal houses of the land.

In the third century Niall of the Nine Hostages assisted Dál Riada to establish themselves in Scotland and subdue the Picts. These Dál Riada were the grandchildren of Conn. There were two septs of these people: one settled in Ulster and the other in Scotland (Alban). Those that left Eire—or the Island of Destiny—Inis Fail, so named from a remarkable Stone that the Milesians brought with them into Ireland, afterwards sent for the Stone to Alban. It was known and is still known as the Lia Fail, or Stone of Destiny. The tradition is that this Stone was a part of Jacob's pillow at Bethel, mentioned in the Bible, brought into Ireland by the ancient Milesians, and the legend runs that "With this Stone ye shall have Empire." For many centuries Kings of the Milesian race were crowned at Tara, sitting on it. The Stone was sent to Scotland for the coronation of Fergus MacEarca, a descendant of Cairbre Riada, Prince of Dalriada in Ulster, and brother

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of the then reigning monarch of Ireland, Murtoth MacEarca. This Fergus became King of the Irish-Scoto Colony of Dalriada in Alban and requested the high King to send over the Lia Fail to be used at his coronation in order to give security to his throne in accordance with the old tradition. It is stated that whenever a rightful king of the Milesian race was crowned, the Stone emitted a peculiar sound or roar, called Ges, which means a spell or charm. At one period it ceased for a long time to make this sound, because it had been profaned by Cuchulain, who resented its silence when a friend of his called Fiacha Fionn was made King at Tara, and the Stone did not resume its accustomed sound until the coronation of the Conn of the Hundred Battles—a celebrated Milesian King of Ireland.

Of this Dalriadic race, sixty-one kings reigned in Scotland for 783 years, down to the death of Alexander III, King of Scotland in A.D. 1286. The Scottish Kings of Bruce, and the House of Stewart, Kings of Scotland, and later on of Great Britain, were, through their mothers, descendants of the Dalriadic kings. King James I laid stress on this when he delivered a speech at the Council Table in

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Whitehall on April 21st, 1613, in which he said :—

“There is a double cause why I should be careful of the welfare of that people (the Irish), first as King of England, by reason of the long possession the Crown of England hath had of that land; and also as King of Scotland, for the ancient Kings of Scotland are descended from the Kings of Ireland.”

The Lia Fail or Stone of Destiny was held in the utmost veneration by the Scots, from an ancient prophecy that the Scotie or Milesian race would continue to rule as long as it was in their possession :—

“If fate’s decrees be not announced in vain,
Where’er this stone is found, the Scots shall reign.”

At first the Stone was taken to the Monastery of S. Colum Cille, or Columba, in Iona. It was afterwards removed from Iona to Dunstaffnage in Argyll, the first royal seat of the Milesian kings. Many people think that before the Stone of Destiny was taken to Scotland it may have been used as an altar stone by S. Colum Cille. Irish missionaries frequently carried about with them a slab or block of stone, which they used as an altar for the celebration of Holy Communion. S. Patrick’s

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stone altar is frequently mentioned in his Acts, and the Irish Kings of Munster, who were crowned on the Rock of Cashel, sat on a similar stone. This coronation stone was so often referred to by S. Patrick that the belief arose that it was the very stone used by him as his altar, and on which he celebrated the Holy Communion after the conversion and baptism of the King of Cashel. It is therefore very probable that the celebrated and mystical Stone at Scone may have been used by S. Colum Cille in the same manner and would also have been used as the coronation stone of the Dalriadic kings. It seems more than likely that when S. Colum Cille solemnly inaugurated King Aidan as King of Dalriada at Iona, he used the sacred Stone. He would only have been following the practice of the great S. Patrick.

S. Colum Cille knew that Aidan possessed great qualities and talents, and was a very ambitious man—and the Saint had an idea that possibly, later on, King Aidan might not only revolt against his overlords in Dalriada in Ulster, but might even attack the Hy Niall, to whose royal race S. Colum Cille was closely related. He therefore told Aidan that his

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posterity would remain invincible so long as they did justice to the Saint and his race, but he solemnly warned him that swift destruction would certainly overtake his "House" should they lift a hand against the Royal race of Dalriada in Eiré. Satisfied with the promise he extracted from Aidan, he helped him at a great council held at Drumceat, at which the King of Eiré was present. It was decided that, in future, the Dalriadic Scots in Alban should no longer have to pay tribute to their overlords in Dalriadic Ulster; that they would join in expeditions and hunts, but not at sea gatherings. Colum Cille attended this meeting in great state, surrounded with a large retinue of bishops, priests and deacons.

Colum Cille's prophecy that misfortune would overtake the Scottish kings if they attacked the Royal race was fulfilled. They made the attempt about a hundred years later. The King of Ireland was still a descendant of the same race as Colum Cille. The Scots of Alban were disastrously defeated; misfortune dogged their footsteps for many, many years, and they were trodden down under the heels of strangers. So they remained until the reign of a famous Dalriadic king, Kenneth

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MacAlpin (A.D. 846), who recovered all the lost kingdom of Dalriada and conquered the Picts as well. He reintroduced the Columban priests, who had been driven out by a Pictish king a hundred years before, and became the first real King of Scotland. It was this King who made Scone in Perthshire his capital, taking the sacred Stone, the Lia Fail, from Dunstaffnage to Scone, and his descendants have been kings ever since.

The Stone was preserved in the ancient abbey at Scone until 1296, when Edward I, King of England, having overrun Scotland, took away the Stone of Destiny. He carried it off as a trophy of victory and placed it under the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey, where it still remains.

The ancient prophecy is still fulfilled, "With this Stone ye shall have empire"—for every British King and Queen for centuries has sat upon it at the Coronation.

Is it not a significant fact that this mystic Stone now reposes in an ancient Abbey, in the heart and centre of one of the greatest Empires the world has ever known, and that the present Royal Family are descended from this self-same race of Milesian kings, through

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Matilda, the wife of King Henry I of England? She was the daughter of Malcolm III, King of Scotland, whom Scottish and Irish writers of pedigrees, the Annalists, trace right back to Niall of the Nine Hostages, monarch of Ireland.

Ever since the Dalriadic Scots settled in Scotland their kinsfolk from Ulster were constantly crossing and recrossing to assist their relatives against the Picts.

The distance between Ulster and Scotland at one point is but fourteen miles, and the natural tendency and easy method was to colonise or conquer across the water, the interior of Ireland in those days being impenetrable forest and bog. This is a fact which is often lost sight of when dealing with the different characteristics between Ulster and Southern Ireland.

It was through these septs of the Dál Riada and their conquests across the water that Alban was first called Lesser Scotia, causing confusion between the two countries for several centuries.

When we are dealing with characteristics, especially those inherited from the Celts, we have to remember that the Celts were only

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the ruling caste in the countries they conquered. In numbers and endurance of type the Attacotti were superior. Just as a shrub, on which has been grafted another and finer species, reverts to type through persistence of the original stock, so at the present day the characteristics of the majority of the Irish race in the South far more nearly represent in character and appearance their Firbolg ancestors than the Celts. The latter race had, in the days we refer to, a splendid physique. Mr. Hyde quotes Giraldus Cambrensis in the twelfth century: "In Ireland man retains all his majesty. Nature alone has moulded the Irish, and, as if to show what she can do, has given them countenances of exquisite colour and bodies of great beauty, symmetry and strength." Cæsar also remarks on the tall stature of the Celts. They certainly were of far larger build than the Romans, and had fair hair the colour of red gold. The never-ceasing tribal wars in the country no doubt helped to wipe them out except in the northern parts where the frequent infusions of fresh blood from their kinsmen across the sea helped to strengthen their stock.

In later years a further restriction increased

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the isolation of the indigenous Irish in the South.

The religious ban on marriage between Protestant Scot or English and the Roman Catholic Irish, which, if not absolutely forbidden, was frowned upon, naturally tended to restrict intermarriage and infusion of fresh blood, and has helped to weaken and largely eradicate the original Celtic strain.

Whether this view is popular or not, it remains a fact that the Celts who crossed to Scotland not only gave their name, their language, their dress and their music to it, but through succeeding generations have inherited their persistent characteristics—the power to rule and colonise.

It is all the more remarkable as Scotland then was a very poor and barren land compared to her rich sister in the South, who had espoused on successive occasions Danish and Norman husbands.

The Scot has resisted conquest again and again, only subdued, to burst forth again.

When at length the crowns were united in a Stewart King, one of their own race, and filibustering raids were rendered impossible, the Scots adopted peaceful penetration. They

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followed their Stone of Destiny, made friends with their hereditary foes and set out to conquer by different methods. Starting with a king of their own blood on the throne, it must be conceded that in proportion to their scanty population they have filled and fill to this day more high positions in the State and the Empire than any other race. Their country had no great natural advantages, but it bred a race of men reared to hardship and daring, and used to adventure and daring as a means of livelihood, a race whose blood, when blended, as it has been, with Norse and Dane, Saxon and Norman, has proved invincible, and won a world-wide Empire which centres round the Lia Fail.

In Christian times Ireland was given the name *Insula Sanctorum*, or the Island of Saints. It has to be recalled that when the major part of Great Britain was in a savage condition, Ireland was, for those days, highly civilised. This was owing to the advent of Christianity at a very early date; there were Christians in Ireland even before the coming of S. Patrick in 400.

Dr. Hyde relates that "The classic tradition, to all appearance dead in Europe, burst out into full flower in the Isle of Saints. During

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three centuries it was the asylum of the higher learning, which took sanctuary there from all over Europe." At one time Armagh, the religious capital of Christian Ireland, was (in Mr. Hyde's words) "the Metropolis of civilisation; the renaissance began in Ireland 700 years before it was known in Italy."

Monks and nuns founded numerous schools of learning which attained great fame, people coming from all parts of the world to study at these seats of learning. The Irish clergy of those days read and taught from secular books and were students of the classics, a practice which the Pope of those days thought scandalous and more than once requested the priests and monks to refrain from such studies under the ban of excommunication.

So entertaining is the account of the teachings of the Celtic monks and the remonstrances of Pope Gregory the Great, somewhere about A.D. 600, that I cannot refrain from mentioning it here.

It is not only entertaining but illuminating, as it portrays the very sturdy independence of thought of the Scoto-Hibernian even in those days—an independence which lost nothing from its ecclesiastical votaries. Some writers maintained, in spite of the fact that S. Columban

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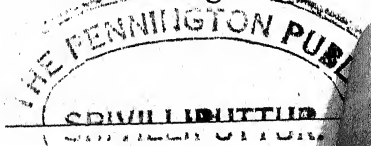
was still called, then and for several centuries after his death, the King of Monks and Conductor of the Chariot of God, that the ancient Irish monks, in the opinion of the Roman Church, lived in an independence bordering on heresy! It must be allowed that these Celtic monks certainly observed a mode of life very far removed from the habits and usages of the Benedictine monks in those territories which now represent France and Germany. On some points of religious doctrine they professed opinions absolutely contrary to those of the Roman Church. Far from bowing to censure they would answer criticism with lofty words and haughtily written epistles expressing disagreement. S. Columban wrote to a certain Bishop of Rome: "Your power will endure as long as your reasoning is correct!" So long does the type endure, that surely these words might have been pronounced in a religious controversy of to-day from some portions of Erin's Isle. Be this as it may, the doctrinal differences of those days would not count for much at the present day. The real difference that existed was their literary taste. The Scot devoured with eagerness all manner of books which were denied to his Latin confrère. All memorials of Pagan

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thought and learning were abhorred by Roman theologists of the day. All the old legends were execrated and destroyed when found. The entire classical tradition was forbidden to the Christian as emanating from the devil. S. Columban was a real poet and he is reputed to have sought leisure in writing in verse to his many friends. He had also studied grammar under the best of teachers, and he continued to teach it when he went to the Continent. S. Gregory the Great thought it necessary to write to a Celtic Bishop of Vienne—"Desiderius"—:

"My brother, I have heard that which I cannot repeat without sorrow and shame, that thou hast believed it thy duty to teach grammar to some of thy people. . . . The same mouth singeth not the praises of Jove and the praises of Christ. Learn how serious, how unspeakable it is (quam grave nefandumque), that a bishop should meddle with those things which should be ignored even by a religious layman. . . . If hereafter it be clearly established that the rumour which we have heard is false, and that thou art not applying thyself to the idle vanities of secular learning, we shall render thanks to our God, Who hath not delivered over thy heart to be defiled by the blasphemous praises of unspeakable men." *

What must have been the feelings of S. Gregory when a letter written in verse by

* *Early Monastic Schools of Ireland*, W. G. Hanson.

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S. Columban to his friend Fedolius fell into his hands ?

"I seek not the treasures which must perish in this world; the gold which the miser heaps up is always poor. . . . The fatal love of gold has inspired many crimes. . . . How many evils did the Golden Fleece cause? . . . A few grains of gold upset the banquet of the gods, created the liveliest debate between three goddesses, and armed the devastating power of the Doric youth against the opulent realm of Troy. . . . Often a chaste woman sells her honour for gold. Jupiter did not change himself into a shower of gold; the shower of gold was the bribe which that adulterer offered. For a necklace of gold Amphiaräus was betrayed by a perfidious spouse. Achilles sold for a sum of gold the remains of the Trojan heroes; and we are assured that the gloomy asylum of Pluto was opened to him who paid an agreed sum in gold!"*

In one of his lectures Mr. W. G. Hanson tells us that the ode was written in Adonic verse :—

"Let us note that this pagan ode is written in Adonic verse, in imitation of the Greeks; and that S. Columban, himself designing the sweet lyre with which he strove to reproduce the ancient harmonies, names it after the gallant Lesbian, the illustrious Sappho. He prays Fedolius not to despise 'these little verses by which Sappho, the illustrious muse, loved to charm her contemporaries, and to prefer for a moment these frivolous trifles to the most learned productions.'"

* *Early Monastic Schools of Ireland*, W. G. Hanson.

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He concludes :—

“ ‘ Thus I wrote, overwhelmed by the cruel pains of my weak body, and by age; for, while the times hasten their course, I have reached the eighteenth Olympiad of my life. Everything passes, and the irreparable days fly away. Live, be strong, be happy, and remind yourself of sad old age.’ ”

Yet S. Columban was a great Christian Missionary—as S. Gregory was a great Christian Churchman. They had different mediums for fulfilling their high calling on earth. Mr. Hanson says truly, “ The Scot, true to his race and instinct, used all and every means for teaching and converting the heathen, deriving inspiration from the Classics and converting them to his use in support of the ethics of Christianity.”

The Irish monks persisted in their studies, and in consequence their knowledge and learning reached a very high standard, whilst their outlook was based on somewhat broader lines than their counterparts on the Continent. These Celtic priests and monks were first of all missionaries. They inherited from their ancestors, as we have shown, the spirit to do and dare—the lure of travel and adventure was in their blood. Through all these stories twines the golden thread of the ideal to do

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and to dare, of the craving for the unknown, of belief in themselves and their mission to go forth, to convince and to conquer. Crowning it all was their great desire and zeal to teach and preach Christianity to the heathen in far-off lands. No obstacle hindered them. They simply went down to the sea in their small hide-covered boats, clothed only in faith and girded with prayer, and sailed away into the unknown waste of waters.

We have independent testimony to the fact that the Irish monks were great voyagers and explorers. Their love of travel combined with fearlessness and zeal was always one of their special distinctions, as was their prodigious activity in extending and multiplying themselves all over the then known world.

The Celt yielded not to the Norseman in his passion for travel; the ambition of the missionary supplied a far stronger incentive to distant enterprise than the mere love of adventure or the hope of gain.

Those who had once been known only as pirates, whose terrible fleets ravaged the coasts of Britain or Gaul, became the peaceful colonists of Christianity.

Many parts of Western Europe owe their Christianity to these Irish monks: Britain,

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France, Germany, Italy, even Spain, received these missionaries. Mr. R. L. Poole has well described them in his *Medieval Thought* : " From Iceland to the Danube or the Apennines, among Frank, Burgundian and Lombard, the Irish energy seemed omnipotent and inexhaustible."

The ancient chronicles of Iceland relate that when that island was first colonised by the Norsemen in 870, Irish hermits were found living on it. In a quotation from a famous Norse book there is this notice : " Anciently there lived here Christian folk whom the Norsemen called Papar. They afterwards went away, as they could not endure the society of heathens. They left behind them Irish books, bells and pastoral staves, so that one could ascertain therefrom that they were Irish."

There is also the work of an Irish monk called Dicuil, written in 825, in which he gives an account of a voyage of some Scoto-Irish monks in 793 to the Faroe Isles. It is mentioned by Icelandic historians that the Icelanders first heard of the existence of America in Ireland, and these same historians relate that in a portion of America, which they describe as " far West, over the ocean from Ireland," and called by them Greater Ireland,

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they found a district colonised by the Irish, where Christianity had been introduced and established. There are accounts of visits of Icelanders to this place, where they mention that an Irish dialect was spoken. (Slendinga Bok. Cl. Landnama II C 22.)

The great Adamman in his Life of S. Colum Cille tells of more than one of such voyages and of the wondrous things that occurred in them. As late as the year 991 the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* relates how "Three Scots" came to King Alfred in a boat without oars from Ireland. The boat was made of two hides and a half. The occupants of the boat reached Cornwall in seven days!

There is surely some foundation of truth in the legend of the marvellous voyage of S. Brendan. He sailed away in the company of several monks towards the West in search of a country that lay beyond where the sun went down into the sea. We even have a description of his ship. Together with twelve of his chosen monks he went to the top of a hill in Co. Kerry. He told them how he had set his heart on seeking the Land of Promise. This hill is still known as Mount Brendan. There, in this remote spot, he built his coracle of wattles, covered it with hides tanned in oak

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bark and softened in butter. He set up a mast in it and a sail. Then he went forth and sailed away for seven long years, to battle with the wind and the tide, the ocean and the air.

Many such strange feats as these took place. They sailed the far Northern seas amidst icebergs and floes. They whispered of fair islands with sun-drowned shores in the magical West. They spoke of other lands, of the Canaries and the Azores.

The end of the eighth century saw great changes in Ireland and to Loch Cuan. The peaceful regular sailings of coracles 'twix Galloway and these shores to the remote Shetlands and sometimes to Iceland were rudely interrupted.

It is evident from very ancient Irish writings and legends that the Scandinavians had raided Irish shores at a very remote period. We find many references to battles with a race of Fomors by the shores of the sea, and we suspect that these sea robbers were none other than the forbears of those who now swept down on these coasts at this period. The coasts of England, Scotland and Ireland were devastated by Scandinavian raiders. Invasion followed invasion by Norse and Dane—those magnificent Vikings who braved the seas in

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their proud high-sterned boats with lofty prows. They brooked no order to turn back to the shores from whence they came. They ravaged the Christian coasts with fire and sword. From Denmark and from the Norwegian fiords there poured out fleets of ships, manned by a fierce and brave race: men trained to the sea as well as the sword. They sailed into strange uncharted waters, naming this Loch the "Strange Fiord," whose 365 islands and submerged rocks must have wrecked many an unwary crew. Our so-called "Island of Saints" was, at this period, torn and distracted by unceasing disputes and internecine wars and she fell an easy prey into the hands of the Norsemen.

Veni—Vidi—Vici: the Vikings came and conquered, and the Vikings, too, have stamped our stock. I wonder if we realise how much influence the Scandinavians have had on the British race? But it is very apparent that we have absorbed not only their blood but their spirit. Blended with the blood of those magnificent old Celtic mariners is the blood of the Norseman, the Dane and the Viking. It flows strong within the sons and daughters of this sea-born race, this sea-girt land, bounded only by the ocean and the clouds.

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We have left the Heroic period of the Celts far behind, but a new era has dawned bringing into vivid imagination, and giving scope to, those inherited instincts of our race. We are living in the Heroic Age of Aircraft. We will sail the air and circle the clouds. Braving the unknown we will again become as the heroes of old. What may we not do? Are we not a nation of navigators? Shall we not sail through space, as our Celtic and Viking forbears braved the seas? The future is in our hands. The youth of these islands will take to the air in ships as their ancestors went to the sea. It is theirs by right of inheritance. The Frobishers, the Drakes and Sir Walter Raleighs will live again. They will be the mariners of the air, the pilots of the destiny of these islands. We can picture in imagination the evolution of our race, who first conquered the seas; and now, who shall gainsay us the supremacy of the air? It is ours to win.

The supremacy of the Air! There is magic in the words. We hear the intoxicating music of Wagner's winged Valkyrie riding through the heavens. The thunder of their steeds is heard and we see the flashing of their armour as they ride the clouds and breast the storm.

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We look up to the heavens and we hear again the high-sounding hoofs of the Horsewomen beating and pulsing through the clouds. We, too, have our Amazons of the Air, our Bellerophons and Heavenly Riders, controlling their aerial steeds. But our horse-power is of a different breed. The horse-power that they ride has a beauty not seen before. There is majesty in a ship breasting the rolling waves, but the beauty of flight is a threefold harmony : the earth—the air—and the aeronaut. The flying machine itself, poised in its natural element, takes unto itself the attributes of the birds. There is swiftness; there is power; there is great physical exhilaration; there is immense purpose and utility. The æsthetic glory of extended vision, which is vouchsafed to the eye, reveals as never before the beauty of the old green earth beneath. We feel we have made a spiritual ascent and surmounted the little finite troubles and errors of the dwellers of the world below.

It is the prerogative of youth to-day to man the air—the fleet of the future, a swan-like fleet, strong and sure, a right royal fleet and an aerial wonder.

The future of these islands is in the air, as surely as it has been their destiny in the past

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to ride the main and rule the sea; to go forth missionaries and legislators, to conquer and to prevail.

If we are true to our character and tradition, the future must witness the British race ruling the Air and riding the Clouds to the furthest corners of the Globe. Her sons and daughters will be swift Missionaries of Peace.

Aerial Ambassadors will wing their way as harbingers of good-will to foreign lands. Time and space will be conquered. Statesman will meet with Statesman from afar in the twinkling of an eye. The Motherland and her Children States will be drawn together.

Aerial enterprise will expedite commerce between country and country.

We must take time by the forelock, or the golden opportunity itself may fly away.

Now is the Age of the Aerial Argonauts, and the Golden Fleece of the future is theirs to win to-day.

"If we fulfil not our 'engagement,'
May the sky fall on us and crush us;
May the earth, opening, swallow us up;
May the sea, overflowing its borders, drown us."

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